

Burning Body Waiting by **dancewithink**

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Summary: Mike and El lived in a world where two people are said to be meant for each other, have known this since they were kids. So why did the truth still hurt like a bitch?

Burning Body Waiting

Notes:

This is a Soulmate! AU inspired by Mitski's Crack Baby and Your Best American Girl

I didn't put a check on graphic depictions of violence however there's some mentions of emotional/psychological violence. Drug use and self-harm are also briefly mentioned. Please be mindful of your triggers.

Part 1 of the **First Love/ Late Spring** series

Your family isn't home so she comes over and drags you into the basement. She starts drawing white lines on the table where you spent your boyhood days making up stories of how you'll save her from her dungeons and his dragons.

She dips her head then, taking in as much as she can in those clean swoops. Her eyes roll back a bit. She's still a natural beauty but had been tired for a decade. She had said so herself during that last drunken tirade. You still call her Old Bones affectionately even though the joke tastes stale in your mouth.

It shouldn't make sense that she's still taking up her spot in your space. Confident and insecure of her right to do so like dust on bookshelves at this time of the year.

When your soulmate writes on their skin, it appears on your own. Some people used this as a means to find the love of their life. They list directions and plan grand meet-ups. Other people adorn their bodies with tattoos, hoping that one day they'd pass by somebody that matched their inked skin. Still there are those that are content with just scribbling in day to day words of encouragement to brighten up their would-be-partner's day.

Still there are those who are scared of finding out. It isn't all romance

and rainbows after all. Not everybody wants to meet the supposed other half. Not everybody falls in love with their soulmate. Some people are even doomed to a lifetime of misfortune just because they've been paired up with really shitty people.

Mike and El lived in a world where two people are said to be meant for each other, have known this since they were kids. So why did the truth still hurt like a bitch?

"Dance with me," she whispers in that soft relaxed tone that still gave you shivers. You hate yourself because giving in meant hurting more. You indulge her as always even though you shouldn't.

She rests her head right above your heart, listening to the telltale signs of a shared but unsaid longing. You have her in the sort of awkward embrace like the ones you used to initiate back when it didn't eat you up with guilt. The couple of minutes that you spent swaying like that seemed to stretch on forever.

Then she lifts her head and looks at you square in the eye. "This is nice," she says to you defiantly. This is a challenge that you always fail because the reply she's looking for isn't yes or a no. You pretend you're oblivious to this and nod instead. She sees through your lie.

El moved into their neighborhood when Mike was 13 years old. She had been a year younger than him but was already wise beyond her years. He used to taunt her about having a grandpa for a soulmate because she was such an old soul but he secretly valued her maturity. The boy was the favorite target among bullies and girls think he's a loser, so having El was really a nice change.

They rode over to school together every morning. Whenever Mike got bruised up or got his garments trashed, El would help him out before they rode back home. On really bad days, he'd be so embarrassed that he'd insist for her to go look for better friends. She would just brush these requests off and ask that it never be brought up ever again.

On weekends, they were either playing video games and watching Cartoon Network at the Wheelers or helping El's foster dad out with

gardening. Mike was happy to tag along in doing the chore because his friend was really fond of plants. She also had a pretty close relationship with the Chief that Mike both envied and marvelled at.

Things were easy between him and El. Real easy.

You hate him then even though this stupid visit was your idea. He now has that stupid apologetic look on his face and it makes you feel small. It feels like you and your stupid heart had shrunk enough that these big feelings that were inside you minutes ago weren't yours in the first place.

You strode back to the table and greet three more thin whites down the line. Down they go as you try to get your mood back up. He puts your little pouch inside your bag. He wipes the tabletop clean, though you were careful not to leave any trace of yourself.

He looks worn but loved like that t-shirt of his that you still keep at the back of your closet. He sits right next to you in that worn couch and shows you a picture book he's holding. "Want me to read you this?" he asks. It's a ridiculous offer so you of course you take it.

It was a hot Saturday afternoon when El at 15 years old decided that it was time to face another demon. They were in the middle of playing a really long streak of tic tac toe when she complained and asked that they do something else. She would always remember that horrified look on his face when she suggested that they write something on the back of their hands.

Before she got adopted by Chief Hopper, El had been living in constant fear of getting punished. Her biological father was a ruthless man. He was careful not to hit her lest anybody found out. But there were a hundred other ways to scar a child without leaving a mark on her skin. Although she hadn't divulged much about her past to Mike, he had already been a huge part of her recovery. El wanted to know if she should trust him with more, if it would be worth it to do that.

It was one of those no-going-back moments. Mike decided to write *knock knock* just to be funny. El settled with a simple *hello*. For her, it

was a kind of out of body experience. When the tip of the marker hit her skin, she mentally recoiled but Mike recounted that she was calm and collected in finishing the task.

The reply arrived a minute after the ink left their skin. *Who's there?* appeared in a neat little handwriting on Mike's wrist. El immediately locked herself in the bathroom and took her clothes off. She has never felt more naked in her unblemished bare skin.

Too soon he finishes reading the silly book about a boy, a pink elephant, and hubris. You wonder if it was him or his pregnant wife who picked it out. You would have asked to see the nursery that was his sister's previous room. But you're not as nice nor brave as you once thought you were.

You've known him for twelve years, have wanted him for ten. *Abject fortune thou art fallen* was a line you really liked. Your hand sifts through his hair, he bends at the touch. He reminds you of the kitten your boyfriend brought home two nights ago.

He moves to settle his head into your lap, stretches in a way that makes his shirt rise up a bit. The sight of that small strip of skin is a suckerpunch to your gut. You had scars on your own skin at the exact same spot. You wish you could forget but you never were good at letting yourself do that.

"What am I to you?" Mike had said at 17. They were sitting at the hood of his car, smoking weed under the stars. They had been fooling around for quite some time but never really talked about it.

"How's your soulmate?" El countered. The first time the two of them had sex happened on this car. They were on their way to one of the biggest high school parties of the year but decided to take a detour instead. It was sweet and they had a couple of good laughs while they were at it. She made sure to leave a hickey that would last for couple of hours. All was fair in love and war after all.

"You know it's all bullshit, right? Why does that have to fucking matter? If you don't have guts to say it, then I will," he faces El then

and grabs her by the shoulders. "I love you. I don't give a fuck if human anatomy tells me to do otherwise. My soulmate doesn't even know who I am but you've known me for years. That doesn't just count for something. That's everything. No one can make us do shit. I love you. I've been in love with you since we were kids." he says, tears streaming down his face.

"And we're still kids," El spat out. "Don't waste your chance for the grand romance just because you're tempted to settle with boring old familiar me. And don't think for a second that you're speaking for the both of us!" She said it with as much venom as she could muster.

"I'm not buying that."

"Well, tough luck, Wheeler. You're wrong in assuming that we want the same thing."

"You don't even know what you want!" he retaliated, hurt but angry as well.

"I fucking dare you to say that to my face again," she snarled at him. She was poised for an attack.

El thinks Mike was smart enough to stay quiet because any reply would just egg her on. The truth was he couldn't have said anything even if he wanted to. He hadn't been prepared for how this turned out.

Mike would only find out about what she had done to herself that night a couple of months too late. He'd never regretted being right about something as much as he did then.

It's almost twilight. She'll be leaving in a few minutes. It was a pleasant few hours of playing pretend. You nuzzle into her stomach, breathing in the smell of fabric conditioner and skin. She'd always been the stubborn one. You wish you never started trying to compete with her for this title.

You can feel her turning listless. Staring at her from below, you envy her boyfriend this view. You reach up and trace her lips with the

bows of your fingers. You can feel it slowly turn into a sad smile.

She gives you a light push. You relinquish your spot. The trip to the front door is funeral. The pair of you pass by so many pictures down the hall, ones that she isn't a part of. You showed her your secret box once. She said you were right in keeping the copies of her face away from the harsh light of reality.

"We're leaving. For good this time."

"You going to marry him?"

"You've kept her waiting long enough."

"Where are you planning to go?"

"It's going to be trip to nowhere in particular. I was hoping we'd just know when we get there."

She leaves. A door closes permanently.

When your soulmate writes on their skin, it appears on your own. Some people used this as a means to find the love of their life. Some are unfortunate enough to experience the exact opposite.

End Notes:

This is the first of a series where I'll be using this particular style. Next installments won't be Soulmate fics.